Yilpinji
Love magic & ceremony

An exhibition of limited edition,
fine art prints by senior
Warlpiri and Kukatja artists.

Yilpinji
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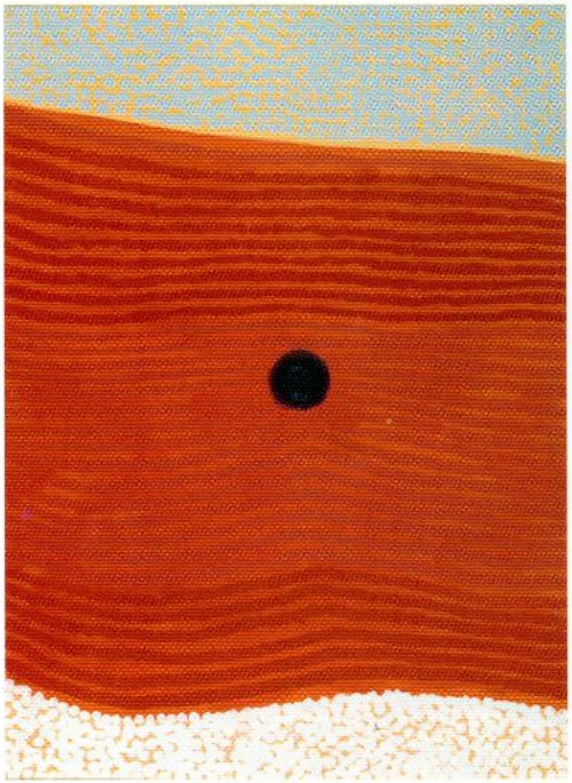

above:
4. HT001
Helicopter Tjungurrayi
This Place My Country
Relief Print. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

cover image:
27. JW006
Judy Watson Napangardi
Love Story
Screenprint. Edition of 99

This exhibition of fine art prints by Old Masters from Balgo Hills, Yuendumu and Lajamanu, explores the powerful traditions of love magic rituals amongst the Kukatja and Warlpiri peoples of the Tanami Desert region.

The powerful traditions of love magic rituals and ceremonies, involving the singing of secret love songs as well as other forms of artistic expression sometimes involve the painting of special designs onto their bodies or the production of 'love objects' to perform these ceremonies.

Called 'Yilpinji' in the Warlpiri language, these ceremonies are enacted separately by men and women as a means of attracting the object of their sometimes adulterous or otherwise forbidden desire. Many Dreaming narratives and associated ceremonies make powerful statements about the consequences of illicit or illegal love - love that is, that offends the strict rules of their kinship structures.

Paintings of Yilpinji not only relate to moral and ethical behavior and the transgressions that occur but they are attached to specific tracts of land. Yilpinji stories and paintings provide guidance about how people should relate to, and interrelate with, one another and with the natural world.

In addition, love magic spells and songs relate to many 'different' Dreamings. They include stories about objects which 'hold' love magic and powerful love singers, as well as tales about faithfulness in relationships and the virtues of nurturing and respecting the object of one's love and desire.

The prints in this exhibition and the stories that accompany them can be understood as concentrated, abbreviated versions of these much longer epic, and living, oral narratives.

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The Exhibition Prints

Prints 1 to 15 are sold as a suite and are not available individually. This Portfolio of fifteen prints by fifteen of the most senior Warlpiri and Kukutaja artists is presented in a handsome black Buckram bound box.

Prints 16 to 29 are available as individual prints.

The Portfolio and individual prints are accompanied by comprehensive documentation prepared by Dr. Christine Nicholls, Senior Lecturer, Australian Studies, Flinders University, cultural historian and author on Warlpiri and Kukatja culture.

1. SM042
Samson Martin Japaljarri
Ngarlu Jukurrpa – Love Story
Etching. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

2. AJ009
Abie Jangala
Rainbow Men
Etching. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

3. PS002
Paddy Sims Japaljarri
Yanjirlpiri – Star
Etching. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

4. HT001
Helicopter Tjungurrayi
This Place My Country
Relief Print. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

5. SB020
Susie Bootja Bootja Napangarti
Kaningarra
Screenprint. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

6. LY001
Lucy Yukenbarri Napanangka
Punyarnita I
Screenprint. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

7. EN002
Eubena Nampitjin
Nakarra Nakarra I
Screenprint. Edition of 99

8. BN003
Bai Bai Napangarti
Love Magic Ceremony Design
Screenprint. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

9. PS004
Paddy Stewart Japaljarri
Ngarlu Jukurrpa – Love Story
Etching. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

10. RL004
Ronnie Lawson Jakamarra
Women's Dreaming
Screenprint. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

11. RT015
Rosie Tasman Napurrurla
First Love
Screenprint. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

12. LH001
Lily Hargreaves Nungarrayi
Liwirrinki – Goanna Dreaming
Etching. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

13. TM001
Teddy Morrison Jupurrurla
Kulukuku – Wild Bush Dove
Etching. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

14. UM001
Uni Martin Nampijinpa
Wayipi Story
Etching. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

15. LN008
Liddy Nelson Nakamarra
Wapurtarli – Little Bush Potato
Etching. Edition of 99
Portfolio Collection

16. JM006
Judy Martin Napangardi
Madjardi – Love Magic
Screenprint. Edition of 99

17. TN004
Tjemma (Freda) Napanangka
Wati Kutjarra
Linocut. Edition of 99

18. TM002
Teddy Morrison Jupurrurla
Wamparna – Bush Wallaby
Screenprint. Edition of 99

19. MT005
Molly Tasman Napurrurla
Wild Bush Plum
Screenprint. Edition of 99

20. LN005 (pictured)
Liddy Nelson Nakamarra
Yumurrpa – Big Bush Potato
Etching. Edition of 99

21. PS003
Paddy Stewart Japaljarri
Ngarlu Jukurrpa – Love Story
Etching. Edition of 99

22. LY002
Lucy Yukenbarri Napanangka
Punyarnita II
Screenprint. Edition of 99

23. EN003
Eubena Nampitjin
Nakarra Nakarra II
Screenprint. Edition of 99

24. EN001
Elizabeth Nyumi Nungurrayi
Kantil Kantil
Screenprint. Edition of 99

25. AJ010
Abie Jangala
Katinpatimpa
Etching. Edition of 99

26. RT014
Rosie Tasman Napurrurla
Grass Seed Dreaming – Ngurlu
Etching. Edition of 99

27. JW006
Judy Watson Napangardi
Love Story
Screenprint. Edition of 99

28. RT013
Rosie Tasman Napurrurla
Grass Seed Dreaming - Ngurlu
Screenprint. Edition of 99

29. TT007
Tjumpo Tjapanangka
Boy's Initation – Wati Kutjarra
Screenprint. Edition of 99

Yilpinji Love magic & ceremony

- I went to the Garden of Love,
And saw what I had never seen...
William Blake, *The Garden of Love*, 1794

I Wonder by my troth, what thou and I
Did till we lov'd? were we not wean'd till then?

...My face in thine eye,
thine in mine appears,
And true plaine hearts
doe in the faces rest...
John Donne, *The good tomorrow*, in Songs and Sonnets, c. 1633-1635

Love can do all but raise the dead
Emily Dickinson, 1945

- All You Need is Love
Beatles song, 1960s

Love is never having to say you're sorry
Love Story, 1970, dir. Arthur Hiller

Io ardo a di segretta fiamma
mi brucia il cuore...

I burn with passion and
a secret flame [of love] burns my heart...
Beccadelli, A., n.d

La passion foudroie les amants.
L'amour les unit pour toujours...

Passion knocks lovers sideways
[literally, 'strikes them down'].
Love unites them forever
French saying

Single, attractive female, academic profession, established, well-travelled, 40s, fit, non-smoker, Asian origin, independent, sincere, passionate; seeks a caring, trusting, loving relationship with a single, educated, compatible male; Reply Box 5549
Personal Columns, Adelaide Review, July 2003

Yilpinji, ngulaji yangka kujakalu watingki yunparni yampirrirla yangka kujakalujana karnta waninjaku ngurrju-mani watingki, yangka kujakalujana karnta panujarlu waninja-waninja-jarri watikari-watikariki, yangka yilpinji-warnuku jintakari-mirnimirnikarikinyanu yilpinji-warnukuju.

... Watingki kanyanurla yilpinji yunparni karnta nyanungu-nyanguku waninja-warnuku. Manu karntangkuyijala kanyanurla yunparni yilpinjirli watiki waninja-warnuku.

...Waninja-warnu, ngulaji yangka kujaka-pala-nyanu karnta manu wati waninja-jarri, yangka kujaka-pala-nyanu wardupinyi miyalurlu, kurturdurrurlu, manu pirlirrparlu kanunjumanyumparlu — yapajarrarlu.

Paddy Patrick Jangala, Warlpiri lexicographer, 1987.

Yilpinji and the Visual Art of the Warlpiri and Kukatja peoples.

Introduction: The Theme of Love in Visual Art: a Comparative Approach
This exhibition explores the visual tradition relating to yilpinji, the so-called 'love magic' practised by the Warlpiri and Kukatja people of the Central and Western Deserts of Australia.

A rich tradition of love songs, poetry, drama and other literature exists in the English language, as well as in European languages, as shown by many of the preceding quotations.

This exhibition demonstrates clearly that the theme of love in art is not, however, the exclusive preserve of western languages or art. It is less well known - or perhaps not known at all in some quarters- that there is, in fact, an equally rich and even longer tradition of Indigenous Australian love poetry, song and other narratives as well as visual art pertaining to love.

In western art forms, including contemporary cinema, love is a pervasive theme. The theme of love is to be found in high art and popular culture alike. The maudlin, mawkish quote reflecting the dominant theme of Love Story provides just one example among the many possible popular cultural expressions of this theme. Equally, the theme and subject matter of love are threads that are woven through 'high cultural' western art history, appearing in all art forms. Examples that come to mind are the troubadour tradition, the love sonnets of Shakespeare, the work of William Blake, Jane Austen, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and more recently still, works by Patrick White and Adrienne Rich, to name only a few.

Sexual transgression also provides the inspiration for a good deal of western art. Historically, this has been a rich source for all art forms, including the literary. D.H. Lawrence's Lady Chatterley's Lover, Radclyffe Brown's Well of Loneliness, Nabokov's Lolita and Philip Roth's Portnoy's Complaint are explorations of less socially acceptable (at least, at the time they were written) or perverse expressions of sexual love. These books encountered censorship following a storm of protest at the time they were first published.

Love - either socially sanctioned or in some way trangressing normative social or ethical boundaries and values -

appears repeatedly as the focus or subject matter of a great deal of both Western and Aboriginal visual art. In European visual arts and literature, both oral and written, a comprehensive list of art works making reference to love would be as extensive as the theme's literary manifestations. Anglo-European visual arts also frequently express sexual love in all of its iterations, including its sometimes perverse and socially transgressive expressions. Among the multitude of possible examples are the many artistic representations of the 'interspecies love' between Leda and the Swan (for example, Leonardo da Vinci's work of 1507; as well as works by Michelangelo, Raphael and Corregio, inter alia); David'spainting The Love of Paris and Helen (1788); and Gérard's famous Amor and Psyche, also known as Psyche Receiving the First Kiss of Love. The latter two works are both housed in The Louvre. In more recent times, Picasso's many depictions of his wives and mistresses; Max Ernst's 1923 work Long Live Love or: Pays Charmant, in the Saint Louis Art Museum, U.S.; and even more recently still, Robert Mapplethorpe's photographic oeuvre spring to mind. Of course there are many more examples from both literature and visual dating back to the Egyptians, the Ancient Greeks (for example Sappho's love poetry) and the Romans and the Italians (most famously, some of Dante's works).

'Love' is also an important theme in the artistic works of many Indigenous Australian groups. The Kukatja and the Warlpiri people have powerful traditions of love magic rituals and ceremonies, involving the singing of secret love songs as well as other forms of artistic expression. Sometimes this involves the painting of special designs onto their bodies or the production of 'love objects' to enact these ceremonies. Called 'Yilpinji' in the Warlpiri language, these ceremonies are enacted separately by men and women as a means of attracting the object of their sometimes adulterous or otherwise forbidden desire. In addition, many Dreaming narratives and associated ceremonies belonging to the Kukatja and Warlpiri peoples make powerful statements about the consequences of illicit or illegal love – love that is, that offends the strict rules of their kinship structures. For example, amongst Warlpiri and Kukatja people the 'love that dare not speak its name' may well be the love (or lust) of a son-in-law for his mother-in-law, or vice versa.

This is an important exhibition in that it presents a side of Indigenous Australia that is rarely shown in the visual arts. In the past, there has been a tendency to depict Aboriginal Australians as belonging to nature, as part of the natural world, rather than as belonging to the realm of culture, in other words, as cultural beings. This exhibition seeks to redress this narrow, clichéd stereotype by positioning Aboriginal people as sophisticated cultural beings with complex Laws relating to love and its trangressions.

The 'Language of Love' is not Universal

For Anglo-Europeans, the heart is considered to be the seat of the emotions, the source of feeling, intuition, and love, whether that love be caritas or eros.

Contrastingly, for the Warlpiri and the Kukatja peoples of Australia's Tanami Desert region, the primary seat of the emotions is not the heart, but the stomach. Happiness, sadness, rage, anger, desire, concern, anxiety, depression, feelings of protectiveness and responsibility towards others, indeed all the intuitive faculties are thought to be located in one's miyalu, or stomach.

In the case of Australian Indigenous art forms, there are many interesting contrasts with Anglo-European traditions. As evidenced by the quote above, falling in love Warlpiri- or Kukatja-style is conceptualized very differently, in terms of the preferred metaphors used to describe the experience. While in English there are expressions like 'broken-hearted', 'heart-breaking', 'heart-rending', 'heartache', 'open-hearted', or 'heart-throb' used to describe a sexually attractive person, there exists an equally rich vocabulary pertaining to the emotions in the Warlpiri language and the Kukatja language, centred on the stomach as the seat of human emotions. For example, 'miyalu-kari' (literally, other-stomached) describes a person in a state of low -spiritedness, that is, a person who is depressed, or down-at-heart, as the English idiom goes; miyalu raa-pinyi (literally, to open up one's stomach) means to make someone happy, as, for example, in the sentence: 'Ngulaji miyaluju raa-pungu, wardinyarramanu-juku' ('He opened my stomach, he made me happy'). (Swartz, 2001:82). This could be compared with the English expression; 'He (or it) did my heart good, made me happy'.

While the stomach is the principal seat of the emotions for the Warlpiri and the Kukatja, the throat ('waninja') is the primary location of sexual love and attraction. Amorous feelings, sexual yearning and attraction are all located, deeply felt and experienced as occurring in the throat (as opposed to the heart). Falling in love is described as 'waninja-nyinami' (emotion that is literally 'throat-sitting' or 'throat-located'). When Warlpiri and Kukatja people fall in love, it hits them in the throat, not in the heart! For this reason special significance is attributed to necklaces and other bodily adornments worn about the neck, close to one's throat, and such decorations are often used in ceremonies pertaining to love. Often these are woven out of hair string and used in yilpinji ceremonies.

It is clear from the above that while the actual experience of sexual desire and falling in love may not differ greatly from culture to culture, the dominant metaphors used to talk 'the language of love' may be very different inter-culturally. As has already been indicated, the body of work in this exhibition has, in part, an educational focus insofar as it demonstrates an aspect of Indigenous life has been so little understood or discussed in the past. Misguidedly, some non-Indigenous academics have claimed that Indigenous languages lack a vocabulary to describe the emotions. In my view such attitudes are founded on ignorance that one hopes will at least partially be contested and challenged by this exhibition.

Love and Marriage in Warlpiri and Kukatja Society

"Love and marriage go together like a horse and carriage" as the English saying goes. But this is not the case in Warlpiri and Kukatja societies. In fact, free choice of marriage partner is a relatively recent development even in western cultures (pace Romeo and Juliet). Even today so-called free-choice marriage is practised in relatively few of the world's cultures. In most societies marriage is a form of economic exchange, and/or another form of transaction between families, and this is most certainly the case in the Indigenous Australian case.

The Warlpiri and the Kukatja recognize full well the inherent instability of love as an emotion. That they understand the potential volatility of this emotion is demonstrated in their cultural invention known as Yilpinji, in all of its manifestations, whether visual, oral and aural. Romantic love and marriage are therefore, for the most part, separated in Warlpiri and Kukatja societies.

The late Warlpiri linguist and teacher Paddy Patrick Jangala, in the quote at the beginning of this essay, provides evidence of a people in whose lives romance and sexual love play an extremely significant part:

Yilpinji, is when men sing with other men, to get women to fall in love with them. The women fall in love with them * as a result of being seduced by the yilpinji songs - in this way each man attracts a woman... A man sings love songs to attract the object of his affections, his desired lover, to him and in the same way a woman may also sing yilpinji [in an all women group] to charm a man who is her beloved, and the object of her sexual desire ** with powerful love songs....'Waninjawarnu' ['from the throat'] is when a man and a woman fall in love with each other, like when two people feel attracted to each other in their inner feelings, in their heart and soul [literally throat and stomach].

*Literally, sing the women to their throats, i.e. the men's throats
**Literally brings the man 'to her throat'

One cannot emphasize too strongly however, that Yilpinji are rule-bound. The works in this exhibition however, for the most part, are visual expressions of yilpinji where the rules have been broken, or the Yilpinji has been abused or mis-used for reasons of personal sexual gratification. Such behaviour is strongly condemned in Warlpiri and Kukatja societies.

The Works in Yilpinji: Love, Magic, Ceremony

These limited edition prints by Old Masters from the predominantly Kukatja settlement of Wirrimanu (Balgo Hills) in Western Australia as well as from Yuendumu and Lajamanu, Warlpiri settlements in the Northern Territory, have come about as the result of a unique cross-cultural collaboration. It has involved Indigenous artists, remote art centre staff and community organisations, a fine art print publishing house, a number of anthropologists who have specialist knowledge of these cultural groups, and two highly experienced and respected non-Indigenous print-makers, Theo Tremblay and Basil Hall.

Paintings of Yilpinji not only relate to moral and ethical behaviour and the transgressions that sometimes occur but, like other Dreaming narratives, they are attached to specific tracts of land. The often-lengthy narratives associated with the Yilpinji paintings provide guidance about how (ideally) people should interrelate with one's fellow human beings as well as providing templates for their interactions with other species and with the

natural world. Dreaming narratives relating to Love Magic ceremonies and themes have a range of manifestations and iterations, and like other Indigenous arts, may be expressed through a variety of art forms.

Dreaming narratives are deemed to be 'owned' by certain individuals and or groups of Indigenous Australian people. A form of orally transmitted copyright underscored by communal ownership still exists to this day within Indigenous kinship systems. Usually only certain parts of Dreaming narratives are made publicly available to outsiders or children. The paintings act as mnemonic devices for the longer narratives associated with them. Dreaming narratives also relate closely to specific tracts of land and environmental features. At the same time they deal with the "big" or important philosophical, spiritual, moral and ethical issues and subjects that concern all human beings. These include life, death, dishonesty and betrayal in human relationships, love, hate, lust, incest, and other extreme emotions and practices. Sexuality, family relationships, relationships between humans and other species are included as well as relationships between human beings and the environment, youth, aging, physical and psychological survival, birth, death, how to raise children, compassion, generosity, meanness, and the like. Many of these Dreaming narratives and their accompanying visual manifestations have a Yilpinji (poorly translated as 'love magic') manifestation or component, providing advice on how not to act, as well as indicating desirable behaviour.

Certain Yilpinji may be glossed as "men (and sometimes women) behaving badly" specifically in the sexual arena. In the western world, we have become somewhat reliant on the media to inform us about 'how not to behave' in terms of sex and gender relations. Many famous sexual scandals brought to light via the media come to mind - the Christine Keeler/Profumo affair of the 1960s in England; the more recent outrage surrounding The American President Bill Clinton and Monica Lewinsky business ("I did not have sex with that woman") are only two illustrations of this. By contrast, Indigenous Australians use the vehicle of the Yilpinji Dreaming narrative and its interconnected expressions in dance, song and the visual arts to provide a similarly enjoyable frisson among 'audiences' as well as a vehicle for condemning improper sexual conduct and thereby to facilitate both teaching and learning about what in fact constitutes 'proper' behaviour in the sphere of sexual relationships.

In addition, Love Magic charms, spells and songs relate to the many 'different' Dreaming narratives on which the prints in this exhibition are founded. The works here include stories about objects that 'hold' powerful love magic, or relay information about gifted 'singers' of love magic (some good, some evil). Yilpinji may be abused as a form of sorcery and many of the works here make reference to that cultural malpractice. Other works in their narrative iterations relate to young and innocent love, or are expressions of long-term faithfulness in love relationships and the virtues of nurturing and respecting the object of one's love and desire. The narrative dimension associated closely with these visual expressions frequently includes reflection upon the terrible, often unforeseen consequences of uncontrolled sexual passion and the human tragedies that arise from this. The paintings, prints and other visual imagery relating to this subject matter can be understood as concentrated, abbreviated versions of these much longer oral narratives. All of the works in this exhibition in some way relate to the theme of love, or love magic (yilpinji) in the Warlpiri and Kukatja contexts and reveal a rich repository of cultural knowledge about this subject. Equally, there are many long, complex, different and fascinating stories relating to all of the art works exhibited here. This is a significant exhibition because it introduces the non-Indigenous world to a critically important but previously little-known aspect of Indigenous social life.

The folio of prints by these accomplished and knowledgeable artists, men and women of 'high degree', explore such themes through the powerful medium of the visual arts. The accompanying catalogue, to be released in 2004, will further cross-reference the images with the social and cultural issues they raise.

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Australian Studies
School of Humanities
Flinders University

References

Swartz, Steve, 2001, Warlpiri Yimi Kuja Karlipa Wangka, Summer Institute of Linguistics, Alice Springs, Northern Territory.

Valiquette, Hilaire (Editor), 1993, A Basic Kukatja to English Dictionary, publ. Luumpa Catholic School, Commonwealth of Australia, Wirrimanu, (Balgo) Western Australia.

Paddy Stewart Japaljarri working on the etching plate for the exhibition print titled 'Ngarlu Jukurrpa – Love Story Dreaming'

The artists, printmakers and publisher

This is a unique collection of limited edition prints in that it is the first time in the history of Aboriginal printmaking that a group of artists has produced a body of work centered around a common theme.

The twenty one artists participating in this project are the most senior from their communities and all are represented in Australian National and or State galleries as well as in major local and international private collections.

The artists have worked on etching plates, acetate cells (for screenprints) and linoleum blocks, in collaboration with two highly regarded non indigenous printmakers, to create the twenty nine original prints featured in this ground breaking exhibition about Yilpinji Love Magic & Ceremony

Basil Hall Editions and Editions Tremblay NFP, two of the most skilled and experienced printmaking studios working with indigenous artists today, have complemented the exceptional creativity of the artists in producing this remarkable collection of prints.

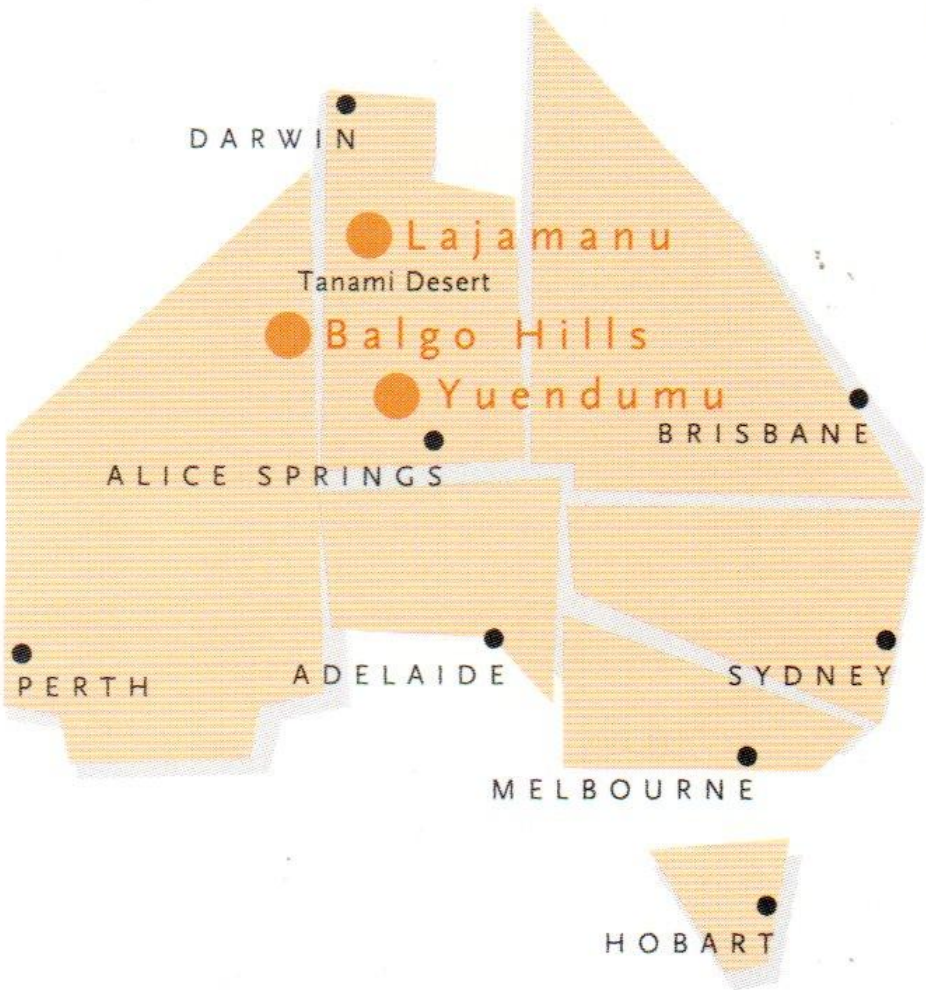
The Australian Art Print Network is the publisher and exhibition tour organizer of Yilpinji Love Magic & Ceremony. It is believed that the quality of the prints, the comprehensive documentation that accompanies the exhibition and the scope of the project attest to the integrity and expertise of the organization and will enhance its reputation as Australia's leading publisher and distributor of limited edition prints by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.

Yilpinji Love magic & ceremony

Participating Artists

Balgo Hills

Art Centre
Warlayirti Artists Aboriginal Corporation
Artists
Bai Bai Napangarti
Elizabeth Nyumi Nungurrayi
Eubena Nampitjin
Helicopter Tjungurrayi
Lucy Yukenbarri Napanangka
Susie Bootja Bootja Napangarti
Tjemma (Freda) Napanangka
Tjumpo Tjapanangka



Lajamanu

Art Centre
Warnayaka Art Centre
Artists
Abie Jangala
Judy Martin Napangardi
Lily Hargreaves Nungarrayi
Liddy Nelson Nakamarra
Molly Tasman Napurrurla
Ronnie Lawson Jakamarra
Rosie Tasman Napurrurla
Teddy Morrison Jupurrurla

Yuendumu

Art Centre
Warlukurlangu Artists Aboriginal Association
Artists
Judy Watson Napangardi
Paddy Sims Japaljarri
Paddy Stewart Japaljarri
Samson Martin Japaljarri
Uni Martin Nampijinpa

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